



City of Grand Rapids

City awarded \$300,000 from local foundations for new eviction prevention program in 61st District Court

10/24/17: GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – The Grand Rapids City Commission today accepted grant awards from the Steelcase Foundation and Grand Rapids Community Foundation totaling \$300,000 to support an eviction prevention program in 61st District Court. The program will reduce the number of evictions in Grand Rapids, improve housing stability, and prevent the cascading, negative effects of eviction. The three-year pilot will run through November 30, 2020. The Steelcase Foundation and Grand Rapids Community Foundation each will provide \$150,000 over three years for the eviction prevention program.

The program will help tenants avoid eviction for non-payment of rent and avoid an eviction judgement. The approach will provide a win-win resolution. Landlords receive payment for back rent and tenants keep their homes without damage to their credit ratings. The project is a partnership with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, or DHHS, and The Salvation Army.

Mayor Rosalynn Bliss touted the program's importance and said she looked forward to the data that would be collected.

"Eviction is recognized as a key socio-economic indicator leading to poverty, which the City needs to consider in addressing community equity issues," Mayor Bliss said. "The data on who is affected by eviction and the causes will allow for improved policy and program responses."

Grant funds will support dedicated staffing to provide pre-court and on-site assistance. This will help tenants access State Emergency Relief funds and other resources available to eligible low- and moderate-income households that normally are able to make ends meet but may need help when an emergency arises.

"The 61st District Court welcomes the partnership with the City of Grand Rapids, DHHS and The Salvation Army," Court Administrator Gary Secor said. "We are excited about this initiative, which will benefit citizens of Grand Rapids."

Affordable housing is more difficult to find in Grand Rapids' current real estate market. Preventing evictions will keep individuals and families in affordable homes and will be less costly than providing emergency shelter, transitional housing or re-housing services.

"The Steelcase Foundation is pleased to support this systemic front-end response that will prevent housing crises before they happen and ensure housing stability for individuals and



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families,” Steelcase Foundation President Julie Ridenour said. “I am grateful for the openness and receptiveness of the judiciary to help address housing challenges.”

Janean Couch, program officer at the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, said the program aligns with the organization’s goals.

“Given the Community Foundation’s focus on equity, we see great value in the eviction prevention program and the unique opportunity it provides to better align resources for those most marginalized in our community,” Couch said. “By preventing evictions, this program will decrease the use of our emergency response system and lessen the effects that having an eviction can have on a family’s future.”

Second Ward City Commissioner Ruth Kelly, who served on the City’s recent Affordable Housing Committee, said she is thrilled to see the program come to fruition.

“This is a good example of how the City and community can work collectively to address affordable housing issues,” Commissioner Kelly said.

She noted that the eviction prevention program was developed in response to the community’s Great Housing Strategies recommendation to “create a court eviction diversion pilot program.”

Several courts in Michigan, including Kalamazoo 8th District and Kentwood 62B District courts, operate such programs to reduce homelessness and mitigate the effects of evictions on housing stability. In the 61st District Court, proceedings will be handled initially through the courtrooms of Judges Distel and Faber. The program is expected to be expanded to all six District Court judges.

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